



United Advocates for Children and Families

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September 29, 2011

Edmund G. Brown, Jr., Governor
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

I am writing this letter to you on behalf of the Board of Directors of United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF). United Advocates for Children and Families is a non-profit organization with a mission to improve the quality of life for all children and youth with mental, emotional, and behavioral challenges and to eliminate institutional discrimination and social stigma. Our 1,800 members include parents and professionals across the state of California.

UACF is aware of the concerns the State of California faces regarding serious budget deficits. We recognize that a reorganization of mental health services was necessary and that merging State government departments may produce necessary cost savings during these difficult economic times.

The Board would like to take the opportunity during this time of unprecedented change to highlight the importance of ensuring the children of California continue to receive the care they deserve. Studies have indicated that over 1 million children in California are diagnosed with a mental disorder every year and 600,000 will not be treated appropriately (Little Hoover Commission, October 2001). The UACF Board is hopeful that your plan will result in a coordinated, integrated, community-based system of care for the thousands of children suffering with mental health conditions. Mental health care must remain one of the state's highest priorities; placing someone at the highest senior policy level that understands core mental health policy, law and regulations in the state bureaucracy will be essential. If implemented incorrectly, the mental health care system will continue to remain extremely dysfunctional. If done properly, there is tremendous opportunity to remedy promises from long ago.

The stakeholder process is very important and has been greatly appreciated, although it is still vague how a newly structured system will address the historic discrimination against the mentally ill, despite state and federal laws requiring parity in treatment for mental health as well as physical health. Also unclear are specifics of long-term funding sources and state oversight of local programs. It is the hope of the UACF Board that this new reorganization will also address the bureaucratic flaws of the implementation process of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA – Proposition 63). Most importantly, an evaluation of outcomes should remain one of the highest priorities under the reorganization.

As stated previously, state oversight and evaluation of outcomes of county programs should remain a high priority under the proposed plan. But above all else, it is imperative that mental health policy secures the highest placement in the state's governmental structure. It is critical that someone at a senior policy level, someone who understands the complexities and the plight of those affected, the policies and law, be appointed to ensure mental health care is a priority for future administrations.

A coordination of services is long overdue, and this reorganization creates an opportunity for the integration of mental illness and substance abuse disorders and will hopefully close the disparities in treatment of mental health and physical health care. Children with mental health conditions, more than any other population, are at the highest risk for social failures yet offer the greatest chance of hope with early and appropriate treatment.

Please ensure they remain the highest priority.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oscar Wright", with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr. Oscar Wright, CEO

cc:

Darrell Steinberg, President Pro Tempore, California State Senate
John A. Perez, Speaker, California State Assembly
Assemblymember Jim Beall, California State Legislature
Diana S. Dooley, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Cliff Allenby, Director, Department of Mental Health
Sean Tracy, Chief, Office of External Affairs
Kiyomi Burchill, Policy Consultant, Office of California Senate President Pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg
Diane Van Maren, Consultant, Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, California State Senate
Board of Directors, United Advocates for Children and Families